

Viet Rout Is Termed A Disaster

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Washington Post Foreign Service

KIENDUC, South Vietnam,
Nov. 10—The fall of Bubong and two other nearby government positions to the Communists last weekend emerges in interviews with refugees and others here as an enormous defeat for the South Vietnamese army—perhaps the worst defeat for Saigon in the fighting since the Jan. 28 cease-fire.

Government spokesmen have admitted that the strategically placed forts near the Cambodian border were overrun and that nearly 300 government troops were killed. But interviews with Montagnard tribesmen and other official and unofficial sources among the tin-roofed shacks of this refugee center near the scene of battle indicate a defeat of far larger proportions.

In Saigon, President Thieu met with his military chiefs yesterday, and a government counterattack is now under way to retake the forts, according to Vietnamese sources.

Lt. Nguyen Cong Dau, who was at the Buprang fort when the Communists attacked, said that 500 men were dead or missing in addition to the 300 trapped and killed inside.

All accounts agree that nearly 2,000 government troops were defending Buprang when Communist heavy shelling and tank assaults began at 5:30 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 4, just 90 minutes after the start of the attack on nearby Bubong. The number of troops defending Bubong and a third spot, Daksong, has not been disclosed.

All radio contact was lost at

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headquarters in nearby Granghia with the 2,000 at Buprang ten minutes after the attack started. What happened by all accounts, was a disaster. Hundreds of soldiers inside the fort were slaughtered immediately as 20 Soviet-built North Vietnamese T-54 tanks, followed by human wave assaults, crashed through the barbed wire and occupied Buprang.

More than 1,000 other government soldiers stationed in the surrounding countryside to protect the fort were scattered at once.

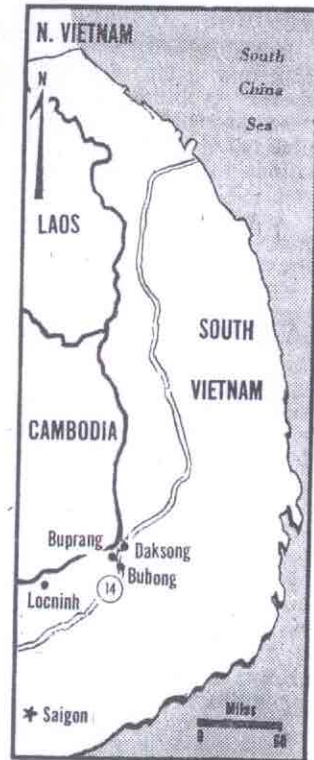
"The ones inside all died, but some of us outside got away," said Lt. Dau, one of hundreds climbing aboard trucks today in the province capital of Granghia, ready to return to battle.

Dieu Kroi, a Montagnard who escaped, said the Communists killed two elephants used by the villagers in Bubong hamlet as beasts of burden and ate them. The Communists demanded rice, he said. They also tied up eight villagers suspected of being soldiers, but the men escaped.

Dieu Kroi said that five villagers died when the South Vietnamese air force bombed part of the hamlet occupied by the Communists. He said about 100 villagers had remained in the area bombed by the planes. He said that as far as he knew no villagers died from direct fire from the Communists.

Lt. Dan displayed slashes on his hands and arms that he said he got as he scrambled and clawed his way through the jungle with Montagnards fleeing from Bubong hamlet. The Montagnards are primitive mountain people generally looked down on by both the North and South Vietnamese.

When the attack came, Dan recalled, the screaming tribesmen only had time to grasp their children and a few possessions before scattering in the jungle valleys. Then they regrouped and began a four-day trek in which women dropped exhausted, old men died and children gnawed at roots for food.



—The Washington Post

S. Vietnamese forces have reportedly suffered their worst defeat since Jan. 28 cease-fire at Buprang and nearby Daksong and Bubong.

large airstrip where hundreds of government troops were sprawled on their ponchos waiting for something to happen.

Several of the soldiers said that they were South Vietnamese army regulars who had just come from Saigon and other areas to provide security for the provincial capital.

The area where the attacks occurred is strategically important because it lies on the Cambodian border and athwart major Communist supply and infiltration routes from the north.

The mountainous, jungle country in this sparsely populated area gradually slopes down to the flatlands where Saigon lies 100 miles to the southwest.

Vietnamese military sources in Saigon said today that since the January cease-fire, the Communists have been developing a supply route from north to south that runs inside South Vietnam and passes down Highway 1, past the three forts that were overrun.

This route will be used in conjunction with the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the traditional Communist infiltration route inside Laos and Cambodia, the sources said.

Together with peculiarities in terrain, the dual system gives the Communists a dry road all year long since the rainy seasons over the two infiltration routes occur at different times of the year.

Both American and South Vietnamese intelligence sources report continuing heavy infiltration of weapons and troops from North Vietnam, and a general Communist offensive that could include attacks on Saigon is expected, although no one speculates when.

Last week, massive air support was not used because the Americans were not here to provide it and because Sunday, Nov. 4, dawned cloudy and drizzling. Only a few planes got in, according to observers.

Dan said he was a member of one of two battalions from the coastal city of Nhatrang that had been airlifted to Buprang a week before it fell.

The airlift took place, according to informed sources, because South Vietnamese intelligence reports showed an enemy buildup in the area and suggested that the fort might be threatened. These sources said that it was because they were fully prepared to fight but the South Vietnamese found the defeat particularly bitter.

Informed sources said that two Communist regiments—nearly 5,000 troops—were involved in the actions at Bupong, Buprang and Daksong.

Vietnamese sources said that the government counter-offensive that began this morning aimed to retake the three forts and to re-open Highway 14, which runs near them and is a major government resupply route for forces fighting in the strategically important wilderness north of Saigon.

You could drive from here to Gianghia, 15 miles to the east, and on the way stop at a